

## Early days in Goodhue County /

### **EARLY DAYS IN GOODHUE COUNTY.\***

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Inasmuch as the writer's advent into Goodhue county did not occur until July, 1857, a comparatively late date when considering the early settlement of that locality, he must needs refer for facts and data, respecting its first explorers, first settlement, and earliest period of development, to such records as those who represent the real pioneers of the county have transmitted to us. Such records are ample for the purpose indicated, respecting all portions of our state, thanks in large measure to the efforts of the Minnesota Historical Society in their collection and preservation.

While Goodhue county was yet a new country at the time I have indicated, the writer found there men and women who for several years had struggled to subdue the wilderness and tame the wild conditions they encountered. Red Wing was already a somewhat pretentious center of the then modern life, and there were promising beginnings of a like condition at Cannon Falls, Pine Island, Zumbrota, Vasa, and Kenyon. The prairies and the valleys of the streams, however, were but sparsely occupied, though an occasional homestead broke the monotony of the wide expanse, which in a few years was to become one of the most prosperous agricultural communities of the Northwest.

### **PERIOD OF OCCUPATION BY THE FRENCH.**

We learn from the records to which reference has been made, that even the earliest explorers of the country were attracted by the natural beauties and advantages of this locality, and were wont to linger in the vicinity as they passed to the remoter regions of the

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great Northwest. It appears that some of the first stockades and trading posts of the early French voyageurs were established on territory now within the limits of Goodhue county.

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Groseilliers and Radisson, the first white men in Minnesota, are thought to have come in the spring of 1655 to the large Prairie island, on the west side of the main stream of the Mississippi at the confluence of the Vermilion river, about eight miles above Red Wing, and to have remained there, with Huron and Ottawa Indians, excepting absences in hunting expeditions, during more than a year, returning to Lower Canada in the summer of 1656. A French trading post, called a fort, was established on Prairie island in the year 1695, in accordance with the command of Frontenac, the governor of Canada, by Le Sueur, as a barrier against hostile Indians, which served the purpose for a time of a protecting refuge for the venturesome explorers of the country.

In 1727, an expedition from Montreal, lead by La Perriere du Boucher, came to the low, sandy peninsula that extends into Lake Pepin, a short distance below the site of the present village of Frontenac, which they called Pointe du Sable, and there built a stockaded fort, named in honor of Beauharnois, who was then governor of Canada. With this expedition came two Jesuit missionaries, Michael Guignas and Nicholas de Gonnor, and their mission chapel, a little log building within the stockade, was consecrated to "St. Michael the Archangel."

### **THE FIRST PROTESTANT MISSIONARIES.**

The next representatives of Christianity and civilization who attempted to utilize the beauty and bounty with which nature invited the white man to occupy the country, were two Swiss missionaries, Revs. Samuel Denton and Daniel Gavin, with their families, who came out to the New World under the patronage of the Evangelical Society of Lausanne, Switzerland. They first established their mission at Trempealeau, Wis., in 1837, removing in the following year to what afterwards became the site of the city of Red Wing. They found

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there a band of about three hundred Dakota or Sioux Indians, descendants of a people who had made the locality their home, so far as these savage wanderers of the earth could regard any spot as their home, for many generations. The then chief of this band of Indians was Hhoo-pa-hoo-doo-ta, which being interpreted means Scarlet Wing; hence the place came to be called by the whites "Red Wing's village." The Indian designation of the 151 spot was Remnicha, which is a combination of three Sioux words, signifying hill, water, and wood, appropriately suggestive of the wooded bluffs of the locality and the great river that flows along their base.

While these missionaries were doubtless successful in some degree in making less savage than in their natural state the Indians with whom they came in contact, and for whose spiritual welfare they were devoting their life's work, it does not appear that their efforts were prospered to an extent to greatly encourage them. The mission was maintained, though much of the time in a languishing condition, until 1846, when from failing health or other cause the Revs. Denton and Gavin gave up their work and the mission was transferred to the care of the American Board of Missions. It was practically vacant the next two years, until 1848, when Revs. Joseph W. Hancock and John F. Aiton were appointed by the American Board to renew the effort to humanize and in some degree civilize the Indians. Mr. Aiton was first on the ground, but did not long remain, as he moved away in 1850. Mr. Hancock arrived in June, 1849, and from that time until the present he has resided near the spot on which was located his mission house.

### **EARLIEST TOWNS AND AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENTS.**

By this time conditions had notably changed in the new Northwest, and the beautiful region washed by the waters of the upper Mississippi had begun to attract attention from the venturesome western pioneer. The advantages of the country had to a limited extent been proven, and the result became known to many who had previously viewed the dim possibilities of the region, with more or less interest. A considerable influx of white settlers had located at various points of vantage in the country, mainly at St. Paul, St. Anthony,

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Stillwater, Mendota, and even far off Pembina. The Territory of Minnesota had been established March 3rd, 1849. A census of the territory was taken under the provisions of the organic act the following June, which showed a total population of 4,780 souls, —principally, it is presumed, classed as white, though including, as we know, many of mixed blood,—of which number Red Wing village contributed thirty-three, twenty males and thirteen females. This was the nucleus from which has been developed the 152 magnificent community of Goodhue county, numbering 31,137 souls, according to the census of 1900.

Early settlement of the locality was somewhat retarded by delay in the extinguishment of the Indian title to its lands, but in 1852 a treaty was concluded which ceded a large area, in which was included most of that which subsequently became Goodhue county. A considerable reservation was made along Lake Pepin, on which the county borders, but this was soon made available to settlement by the purchase of scrip representing the land, issued to the Indians and mixed bloods, for whose benefit the reservation was made. This treaty also provided that the Indians should be removed farther west, and, according to its terms, they were located in 1853 on a reservation provided for them on the upper waters of the Minnesota river.

Rev. J. W. Hancock may be regarded as the father of Goodhue county. Though not the first white man to locate within its limits, he was the first one who faced the discouraging conditions that for a time confronted him, and who maintained throughout a determination to remain and make the locality his home. His work among the Indians was fruitful of good results, and his counsel contributed greatly in encouraging and aiding the efforts of the whites who now began to gather about him, in organizing and maintaining a civilized community. Among the first recruits who came to his aid in this behalf, and who took a leading part in the subsequent development of the locality, were John Day, Dr. William W. Sweney, William Freeborn, Calvin Potter, James McGinnis, E. C. Stevens, David Puckett, Charles Parks, and Warren Hunt, who came in 1852; also Matthias Peterson and Nels Nelson, who were respectively the pioneers of the Norwegian and Swedish nationalities,

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which early became a considerable and most desirable element of the population of Goodhue county. H. L. Bevans, William Lauver, James Akers, Norris Hobart, Mathew Sorin, Reazin Spates, T. J. Smith, Hugh Adams, E. P. Lowater, and others, came in 1853. Abner Post, George W. Bullard, and James Wells, had come to the locality in 1850, but had established themselves some miles south on the shore of Lake Pepin. Through their efforts the village of Wacouta was started, which flourished moderately for a time as a rival of Red Wing, but failed to maintain itself in competition with its more energetic neighbor.

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Red Wing was surveyed and platted in 1853, the town proprietors being William Freeborn, Alexander Ramsey, B. F. Hoyt, and C. L. Wells. This year saw a moderate overflow of the population of Red Wing onto the prairies and into the valleys in the vicinity, and the fertile soil of that region began to disclose its capabilities for the support of civilized man. The county was established by act of the Territorial legislature, approved March 5th, 1853, and was named for James M. Goodhue, the pioneer journalist of Minnesota, who commenced the publication of the Minnesota Pioneer in St. Paul in April, 1849. Goodhue was a native of New Hampshire, where he was born March 31st, 1810, and died in St. Paul, August 27th, 1852. He is represented to have been a man of marked individuality, restless and impulsive, a writer of much ability and force, who achieved great success in his profession as a journalist. A contemporary has remarked of him, that "with the ingenuity of Vulcan he would hammer out thunderbolts on the anvil of his mind, and hurl them with the power and dexterity of Jove."

The county was duly organized by the appointment by Governor Ramsey of a full set of county officers to serve until an election under the law could be held, Red Wing being designated as the county seat, and Goodhue county thus became a well defined entity of the prospective commonwealth of Minnesota.

As an illustration of a day of small things, it is interesting to note that the first session of the Board of County Commissioners of Goodhue county was held June 16th, 1854, on a

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pile of lumber on an otherwise vacant lot in Red Wing, when an organization was effected and an adjournment taken to a later date. At the next meeting a careful estimate for the budget for the ensuing year indicated that it would be necessary to raise \$554.09 to meet the same, and a tax of one per cent on an assessed valuation of \$65,305 was levied to provide the required funds. If there was any graft in that estimate, it did not appear in the figures upon which it was based, nor do I think there was evidence of it in the subsequent disbursement of the money. It was also voted at this meeting to submit to a vote of the electors of the county a proposition authorizing the creation of an indebtedness to the amount of six hundred dollars, with which to provide a suitable Court House for Goodhue 154 county. What the character of the edifice thus contemplated would have been had the scheme matured, is left to the imagination, for the proposition was defeated at the election.

Like all portions of the more accessible sections of the territory, Goodhue county received considerable accessions to her population during the two or three years following, and her development in other respects maintained a corresponding pace. Early in the year, 1855, a United States land office was located in Red Wing, with W. W. Phelps as register, and C. C. Graham as receiver. This gave the village much local importance for a time, until the removal of the land office to Henderson on the Minnesota river. The lands within this district were largely of a most desirable character, and hence, as immigration came into the country, they were rapidly taken up as homesteads, or by the location of warrants, Indian scrip, or in other legal methods of acquisition.

Speculators were hovering like vultures over the country, so that, for possession of some of the finest tracts, there was much competition. On these many squatters had located before the land had been surveyed and subdivided, and as a consequence there were many serious conflicts between rival claimants, which at times threatened trouble. The condition became so serious that a vigilance committee was organized in Red Wing for the protection of the squatters against the schemes of the speculators. The methods of the committee were generally effective, and as a rule the squatters' rights prevailed. The usual procedure was that, when the offending land grabber appeared at the land office to

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establish his claim, he was hustled to the bank of the Mississippi, and there was required to formally relinquish all claim to the disputed land or take the alternative of a ducking, with the near possibility of being drowned.

### **FOUNDING HAMLINE UNIVERSITY.**

In 1855 also the educational and religious interests of the community received a notable stimulus by the establishment of Hamline University in Red Wing. This institution being under the patronage of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Red Wing naturally became the center of influence for the time of that denomination for the Territory of Minnesota, and the headquarters of many of the great lights of Methodism of the Northwest. There were evangelists 155 in those days whose mighty work for Christianity and civilization proved a powerful agency in giving direction to the moral, intellectual, and religious character of our people. A conspicuous element of the community of Red Wing in the latter fifties, was a group of these men, who became distinguished for their great ability, untiring industry, and absolute devotion to their work. Such men as the Rev. Dr. Akers, Mathew Sorin, Chauncey and Norris Hobart, Jabez Brooks, Daniel Cobb, B. F. Crary, and others, made a notable aggregation of great minds. With perhaps an exception or two, they have all passed to their reward, leaving a rich legacy of good accomplished for posterity.

Hamline University was removed from Red Wing many years ago to its present location in St. Paul, where it has developed, under the inspiration given it in those early days, into one of the leading educational institutions of our state.

### **INCORPORATION OF THE CITY OF RED WING.**

The growing village of Red Wing early attained a high reputation for its good morals and sobriety. For a long time the sale of liquor was not only prohibited, but was actually prevented in the village and vicinity. The temper of the community in that respect was submitted to a test while these model conditions prevailed. Several barrels of whiskey were smuggled into the village, but the effort to distribute and utilize their contents signally

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failed. The whiskey was made to swell the volume of the Mississippi's flow, and the parties responsible for this effort to discredit the good name of the community were taught a lesson that was well remembered, and that had the effect to discourage a like experiment for a long time thereafter.

In March, 1857, Red Wing was incorporated as a city, its first mayor being J. C. Weatherby, one of its pioneer merchants and public spirited citizens. During the early months of this year there was a notable swell in the volume of immigration into the country, which greatly stimulated the spirit of speculation that had been uneasily slumbering for a time, and which developed in its subsequent activity the inevitable boom which must come as an early experience to all new countries. Numerous new townsites were projected and the future was many times discounted in the values at which corner lots and eligible locations for all sorts of 156 industries were offered. Business enterprises were undertaken on a scale that might have been justified a decade of two later, but which met their inevitable fate in the reaction that soon involved every interest in the country. The newcomer at once became infected with the hopefulness and enthusiasm that was in the air, and that seemed to inspire and stimulate every member of the community in whatever undertaking he was engaged.

### **FOUNDING THE RED WING REPUBLICAN.**

It was just at this time that the writer drifted into the current of immigration that was strongly flowing westward, and became a resident of Red Wing in July, 1857. He brought with him an old Washington hand press and a quantity of indifferent type and other printer's material, which had recently been doing duty in another locality in the advocacy of "squatter sovereignty," with which he established the Red Wing Republican, a weekly newspaper. From the date of its first issue, September 4th, 1857, it has been continuously published until the present time. The new editor was no printer, but he soon became more or less of an expert in "sticking type," working the press, and writing boom editorials in exploitation of the locality, and of the interests of the Territory in general.



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My experience in soliciting business was not of the kind that stimulates the hustling qualities of the canvasser or commercial agent of the present day. The question was not the competition to be met, or the quality of goods to be exploited, but rather the effort required to find possible customers in the then sparsely settled region of Goodhue county. Most of the residents of Red Wing were induced, as a matter of public spirit, to subscribe for the newspaper, and nearly all the business and professional people of the young city gave it moderate advertising patronage, but a more extended support must be secured if the enterprise was to prosper. In the effort to secure this, every trail, bypath and highway in the county became almost as familiar to the writer as the single plank walk extending between his office and boarding house. There were then only two habitations on the old Zumbrota road between the Hay Creek and Zumbro river valleys, a distance of about fifteen miles, which illustrates the condition of "magnificent distances" that impressed the traveler when crossing the prairies of Goodhue county 157 forty-seven years ago. The sites of the now thriving villages of Zumbrota, Pine Island, Cannon Falls, and Kenyon, were occupied by the nucleus of their present prosperous development; but throughout the county at large the monotony of the horizon was only occasionally relieved by the sight of a settler's cabin.

As an illustration of this condition, a patron of the paper proposed to trade a quarter section of land in Goodhue township, about fifteen miles from Red Wing, for two hundred dollars' worth of advertising and job printing, but there seemed to be too much land in that section for any useful purpose and the trade therefore did not materialize. A few years ago the writer was advised that this same quarter section of land, with but moderate improvements, could be bought for eight thousand dollars, spot cash.

The recent rapid increase of the population of the Territory had developed conditions that warranted the taking of steps preliminary to the admission of Minnesota as a state of the Union, and questions pertinent thereto began to agitate the people. Party strife was then strenuous throughout the country. It was during the Buchanan regime, when the

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Kansas-Nebraska issue, involving the question of the extension of slavery, was violently agitating the country, and premonitions of impending trouble that finally culminated in the war of the rebellion were painfully felt by all our people. These conditions had spread to the remotest frontier, and Minnesota became involved in the political contention that elsewhere prevailed. The Territory was of course under democratic influences, its officers being appointees of President Buchanan, and Goodhue county was practically dominated by those who professed that political faith.

With more enthusiasm perhaps than discretion, the editor of the new paper waded into the political controversies of the time. The Constitutional Convention met and split upon partisan rocks, and for a time it seemed (if you will pardon the paradox) that the ship of state would become stranded before it was fairly launched. A bitterly contested election followed for state and county officers and members of Congress, in which the Democrats won by a narrow margin on the general ticket, but Goodhue county was “redeemed.” The new editor, though then, as later, bearing the character of a man of much modesty, did not fail to claim his full share of credit for the result achieved in the county. It was a period of bitter partisanship, and in reverting to it at this distance of time one can but wonder that in the heat of party conflicts, which were almost continuous in their character, the pleasant personal relations that characterized the pioneer days of Minnesota were so generally maintained.

### **THE FINANCIAL DEPRESSION OF 1857.**

The pioneers of the fifties in Minnesota had fairly established the character of their new home as a region of superior agricultural resources, and in climatic conditions most healthful to human life, and they were beginning to realize somewhat from their efforts the fruition of their hopes, when the worldwide financial revulsion of 1857–8 came upon them like a withering blast. While the effect of this general collapse of nearly all business interests was seriously felt throughout all sections of the country, the frontier, and especially the Minnesota frontier, felt it in an exceptional degree. The natural resources

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of the country had not yet been developed sufficiently to afford a living to the people who had sought a home upon its soil. The necessities of life were yet to a large extent being brought from the East and South. Nearly every steamboat that came up the Mississippi had its decks loaded with flour and meat, to pay for which the limited wealth that had accumulated, and that the more recent immigration had brought into the country, was soon exhausted. You have all had experience with the financial disturbances of more recent periods, but I venture to say that those of you who were here at the time to which I refer would characterize the panic of 1857–8 as the climax of financial distress, to which nothing of like character in subsequent years is to be compared.

It was during the days of wildcat banking in the West, and the discredited issues of the institutions thus classed constituted practically all of the limited money there was in the country. Even this rapidly depreciated in value and soon became worthless. It was for a time a more or less intricate problem for one to keep himself advised of the daily depreciation and consequent current value of the occasional bank note that came into his possession. The prime necessities of life were relatively dear. The country had nothing on which to realize, except lots in embryo towns, and these soon lost their intrinsic as well as their inflated values, and became no longer current as a medium of exchange. The expedients resorted to for a supply of currency were amusing, though strikingly suggestive of the extreme distress of prevailing conditions. The State paid its obligations in warrants of doubtful value, because of their uncertain redemption. County, city, and town orders were “floated;” merchants and other business establishments issued “scrip;” and individual due bills became “thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks in Vallombrosa,” whose only element of redemption was a promise of renewal.

Under the stress of these conditions, a proposition was formulated, and was urgently pressed, for a loan of the credit of the State, to the amount of five million dollars, to aid in the construction of the several “land grant” railroads, whose lines had been surveyed or projected to span the state in all directions. The proposition involved an amendment to the State Constitution recently adopted, and a measure for the purpose was offered

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early in the legislative session of 1858. The movement precipitated a fierce contest, but the representation which was pressed with all its plausible force, that its adoption would result in the disbursement of five millions of money throughout the state, proved an appeal that no argument could withstand. It passed the legislature and was adopted by a popular vote of nearly four to one. Goodhue county being comparatively remote from any of the proposed lines of railroad, its people were generally opposed to the proposition in its early presentation, and the young editor at once antagonized it in his newspaper. He was loudly applauded by his constituents for the vigor of his fight against the swindle, as it was termed, when the campaign opened; but as it progressed he realized that these plaudits perceptibly lessened, and as it reached its close he was made to feel, in his solitude, much like the chief mourner at a funeral. His vindication came, however, some months later, in the disastrous collapse of the entire scheme, which, instead of bringing the promised financial relief, imposed a heavy burden of debt upon the state, on account of which its credit greatly suffered before the burden was removed.

Minnesota had no usury laws in those days, hence money was "worth what it would bring." Five per cent a month was current interest for a time, as the writer well remembers in recalling his 160 experience with a loan of one hundred dollars made upon that basis. The principal sum became a matter of minor moment, but the monthly demand for interest caused the debtor often to anxiously "walk the floor." The recollection of the pretexts resorted to, the economies practiced, and the privations suffered by most of our people in their endurance of the conditions encountered in those panicky times, no doubt brings an occasional thrill to the consciousness of many, even to this day, as those experiences are sometimes recalled to mind.

### **RESTORATION OF PROSPERITY.**

But the pioneer is a man of almost limitless resources. That is the characteristic that chiefly distinguishes him. His recuperative quality, ever manifested after disappointment or apparent defeat, is the dominating influence that buoys him up and bears him on. He is

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always hopeful, ever determined and never daunted by obstacles that might discourage the average man. He encounters with equanimity adverse conditions and overcomes them, as a part of the expected experience with which he must deal in his efforts to achieve success. The people of Goodhue county, and of Minnesota generally, did not linger long in the cave of gloom that for a time seemed to constitute their environment as a consequence of the financial panic of 1857–8. They went through a sort of voluntary liquidation, in which things were in a manner evened up all around, and a new start in life began.

There was soon a perceptible rise in the tide of immigration into the country. Large colonies of Scandinavians, Germans, and other nationalities direct from the northern countries of the Old World, brought frequent accessions to the population, and under their patient and industrious efforts the prairies of Goodhue county were rapidly transformed from their wild condition into comfortable homes and prosperous centers of thrifty people. The country soon became self-supporting. Imports of food stuffs practically ceased, and steamboat interests on the Mississippi sought cargoes rather in the surplus grain the country produced than in the importations that fed the people in former years. Farm lands appreciated in value, and even town lots began to be redeemed from the threatened forfeiture of the delinquent tax list.

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The agricultural development of the country gave a substantial stimulus to all business interests, and thereby contributed to the towns a new resource with which to renew their life. The clouds of adversity gradually rolled away, and the sunshine of a coming prosperity sent genial rays of hope into the hearts of all the people. The census of 1860 gave Goodhue county a population of 8,977, which indicates, at a glance, the remarkable progress made in the development of the county in the years immediately prior to that date; and when it is noted that the major portion of this increase in population were settled upon the prairies and along the valleys, the substantial character of this growth will be recognized. The wonderful crops of grain grown on the farms of this county gave early

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proof of the great fertility of its soil, and, to the mind of the observant and prophetic, brought premonition of the conditions which in a few years made Red Wing the largest primary grain market in the world, a distinction that city enjoyed for several years, until the construction of railroads through its tributary territory considerably curtailed the area that sought that point for a market.

### **SERVICE OF GOODHUE COUNTY MEN IN THE CIVIL WAR.**

These conditions of encouragement and promise had inspired a hopefulness in the future that stimulated every interest and infused activity into every enterprise in a notable degree. The strain of the panic had become wholly relieved, and the distress of the period it covered was wellnigh forgotten, when the black cloud of civil war began to develop upon the horizon of the country. The political turmoil of preceding years had often threatened trouble, but it had always been averted by one of the many notable compromises of our history, so that the portended crisis for the time was postponed. The country had become accustomed to this manner of adjustment of its sectional difficulties, and had confidently looked for a settlement upon such lines of the differences that then divided parties and sections, hence it was not prepared for the culminating crisis that now confronted it. There was no section of the North, however, that rallied sooner from the terrible shock, or that came to the rescue of the government with greater promptness and enthusiasm than the frontier 162 communities which then constituted one of the youngest states of the Union. The claim has been often made, and I believe is yet undisputed, that the first offer of volunteers for the war came from Minnesota; and in the organization that went to the front under that tender of aid, there was a large contingent from Red Wing and Goodhue county.

The news of the attack on Fort Sumter reached Red Wing April 19th, 1861, and at the same time there was received President Lincoln's proclamation calling for 75,000 volunteers for three months' service. A public meeting was held the evening of the same day, which in many respects was the most notable public assembly ever held in that

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community. No subsequent even in its history had attached to it equal significance with that which called the people of Red Wing together at that time, and in which they pledged their lives and fortunes for the maintenance of the Government in its full integrity.

The practical result of this outburst of patriotic enthusiasm was the enrollment of a company of 114 men, which within a week was on its way under the lead of that grim old veteran, Col. William Colvill, to Fort Snelling for muster into the military service of the United States. Within another week a second company was enrolled and tendered to Governor Ramsey, but it was required to wait until a second regiment was authorized before it could be accepted. In every succeeding call for volunteers Goodhue county responded with numbers generally exceeding her quota, and was thus represented in every organization save two that was raised in the state during the war. The final record of her patriotic tender to the cause of the Union was a total of 1,508 men mustered into the military service from a population of 8,977, or one man in every six of the population, including men, women, and children. Included in the number who bore commissions there were four colonels, one lieutenant colonel, and three majors, all of whom rose to these ranks through subordinate grades; eighteen captains, twenty lieutenants, one surgeon, and one chaplain.

The drain of the war upon the population and resources of Minnesota, in conjunction with the paralyzing effect of the Indian outbreak of 1862 and its consequent desolation of her frontier, proved a serious check to the continued development of all interests throughout the state, and Goodhue county of course shared in this condition. Recovery from the depression thus produced was for a time exceedingly slow. The atmosphere, however, had been cleared. The integrity of the Government had been vindicated, and its permanence was assured by the removal forever of the cause that had so often threatened its existence. The Indian problem had been solved in a manner that rendered impossible any recurrence of the conditions which unsettled life and made it precarious upon the frontier. These considerations infused into the situation a feeling of security and confidence in the future, which had a powerful influence in the rehabilitation of the country.

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Its recovery came, prosperity returned, and the wonderful development followed that has given us the imperial commonwealth in which we so greatly rejoice today.

### **SOME EARLY CITIZENS OF THIS COUNTY.**

This brief and cursory mention of early experiences in Red Wing and Goodhue county does not pretend, as must readily appear, to constitute in any sense a history of the period which the narrative covers, but is rather a record of personal recollections. In the same sense it may be appropriate to add the writer's estimate of a few of the citizens that were prominent in the community in those early days, and for whose labors in its building up succeeding generations must cherish most grateful memories.

One of the earliest settlers in Red Wing was William Freeborn. He was a typical pioneer. He had kept on the outer edge of civilization all his life. The more primitive his surroundings, the more contented he became. He accounted of little worth anything that did not require effort and hard knocks to attain, and of all things that came easy he was ever suspicious. He revelled in the conditions that prevailed when he came into the country, but he became uneasy as he saw it develop and population increase. He lived for a time in St. Paul, but, feeling that he was being crowded there, he removed to Red Wing in 1852. Freeborn was a most hospitable and kindly gentleman and a public spirited citizen, always ready to aid in all efforts to promote the interests of the community; yet he seemed to dread the conditions that he soon realized as existent, that the real frontier was rapidly receding from him. He often boasted that he had never seen a railroad, and that he never intended to expose himself to the influence of that particular agency of progress. For a time he felt secure in that respect, as he thought, with most of us, that it would be a long time before a railroad would seek to compete with the mighty Mississippi in the matter of transportation. When it became probable that railroads would soon invade the country, he trekked with his young family and household gods in prairie schooners to the far-off Pacific coast, and finally located, after many months wandering, in a part of California, where he recently died, remote from the disquieting shriek of the locomotive.



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A close associate of Freeborn's in the initial development of Red Wing was Dr. William W. Sweney. The doctor, though a man of some peculiarities, was a most lovable character. He was an educated gentleman and a physician of exceptional ability. He was one of the pillars of Red Wing for many years, proving most helpful in all matters relating to the upbuilding of the community, and was among the first to be consulted on any question of public interest. The doctor was an ideal sportsman, and the streams and wooded bluffs that abound in the environs of Red Wing, with their abundant life of fish and game, were to him an earthly paradise, in which he sought frequent relaxation from the somewhat exacting duties of his profession.

William W. Phelps was an aggressive force in the development of the county, a characteristic supported by ability and culture of a high order. He was a leader in public affairs, and his influence proved potent in the direction of agencies that gave character to the community. He was one of the first members of Congress from the State of Minnesota, and served several terms as mayor of Red Wing.

C. C. Graham, or "Uncle Chris," as he was known by everybody, was essentially a character, a most substantial citizen withal, ever alert to promote the public good, but always looking for the ludicrous in whatever came to his attention. He was one of the cheeriest and sunniest characters I ever met; and when one was oppressed with the blues, if he could have a little chat with "Uncle Chris," his normal condition would soon be restored. The most serious subject or situation had its redeeming side to him, and if there was any element in a depressing condition to relieve its character, he would bring it to the surface at once.

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Joseph A. Thacher, of Zumbrota, the "farmer statesman" of Goodhue county, was a central figure around whom the rural population of the county were wont to rally. He had many of the characteristics of the New England puritan, but a long residence in the West had modified their asperities. He had well defined views upon all public questions,

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and did not lack ability or inclination to vindicate his opinions when occasion offered for their expression. He served in the legislature of the state, and would doubtless have represented his district in Congress but for his rigid views of political ethics, which restrained him from adopting the methods in vogue and practiced by aspiring politicians in his time. He early realized the substantial character of the resources and capabilities of the new country in which he had made his home, and hence had unlimited confidence in the possibilities of its future. He did much to advance the material interests of his immediate locality, and is gratefully remembered as one of the founders of that delightful community, cosily nestled in the charming valley of the Zumbro.

Judge Eli T. Wilder, though not one of the earliest settlers of Red Wing, was from the time he came there in 1856 to the date of his death, which occurred less than a year ago, at the age of ninety, perhaps one of the most prominent, as he was surely one of the most stately characters in that community. He had served on the bench in Ohio, and, when relieved from that duty, came west, seeking a change of climate for the benefit of his health. The judge was essentially judicial in all his relations in life. He spoke with marked deliberation, and when expressing his opinion upon any subject, it impressed one as an authority by which it would be absolutely safe to be guided. He was logical in all things, thoroughly dissecting any subject with which he had to deal, and exposing pretense or fraud with merciless emphasis. Naturally Judge Wilder's influence upon all matters relating to the weal of the community was very great, and his advice was ever followed with a confidence that no mistake would be made in doing so. Under a somewhat austere exterior, he possessed a most kindly and sympathetic nature, which often brought cheer to his fellowman.

Theodore B. Sheldon was foremost among the representative business men of Red Wing. He was always among the first to aid with his counsel and his means every enterprise, with rare exception, that was proposed for the promotion of the business interests of the young city. The records of nearly every corporate industry or interest that has been developed in that locality, during a period covering nearly half a century, will disclose his

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name often at the head of the list, as one of its promoters. His liberality and public spirit in this behalf stimulated others to like action, and thus he contributed greatly to the growth of the city. That he exercised sound business judgment in these matters is evidenced by the large estate he left at his death, which occurred in 1900. Eighty thousand dollars of his estate he bequeathed to the city, for the erection of a memorial expressive of his regard for the community with which he had been identified for so long a time. This memorial is now represented by one of the finest auditorium structures to be seen in the Northwest.

Red Wing lost one of its most earnest and effective early supports in the death of Charles Betcher in 1903. A resident of the place for nearly fifty years, he was for much of that time at the head of what became perhaps the largest manufacturing industry in the city. His contribution to the commercial activities of the locality gave to those interests much strength and character. He always took the conservative side of public questions, and his restraining influence often had a wholesome effect in determining the policy adopted in the management of public affairs. He was a positive character, not easily persuaded after he formed an opinion, but always deliberate in reaching his conclusions.

This list of pioneers of Red Wing and Goodhue county, who have passed away, and who have left an impress upon the community that will long remain to distinguish it, might be greatly extended. Such an enumeration should also include the few of the early settlers who are yet living, and who in their declining years encourage by their counsel the later generation, which has inherited in full measure the ability, energy, and ambition of their predecessors, as is evidenced by the continued progress and prosperity that give Red Wing high rank among the progressive cities of Minnesota.